

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES: *THE WASHINGTON DC EXPERIENCE*



**F**or TOD to be appropriate in the District of Columbia, it must respond to the unique conditions of the neighborhoods of this city. On June 8th, 2002 a community training workshop was held to review the general principles of transit-oriented development and discuss their application in District neighborhoods. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage broader understanding of TOD, the challenges and opportunities it presents, and the positive impact it can have on our neighborhoods.

One hundred people attended this workshop representing every ward of the city. Many of the participants were Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs) responsible for gathering and conveying neighborhood reactions to development proposals that come before the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) or Zoning Commission. The goal of the workshop was to help ANC Commissioners understand, craft, and share TOD principles with the residents of their neighborhoods.

Also in attendance were neighborhood association leaders, community activists, small business entrepreneurs, DC Main Street organizations, community development corporations, and interested individuals. Many people came to the workshop knowing very little about transit-oriented development or urban design. They came because they were interested in the topic and wanted to learn more about how to use transit assets to meet the goals of their neighborhoods for growth or stability.



Washington is unlike any other city. Each neighborhood must adapt TOD principles to the unique conditions of their community and the unique needs and objectives of their residents.



On June 8, 2002, residents from across the city participated in a community training workshop to explore how transit can help define the active center of District neighborhoods.



## WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

For the past three decades, the Washington region has experienced tremendous population growth. Over the same period; however, the District of Columbia has lost nearly a third of the city's population, from a high of 802,000 in the 1950s to 572,000 currently. Today there is an upward trend in population as the District is once again beginning to capture a portion of the region's growth. While all neighborhoods can expect change, development pressures are uneven. Neighborhood residents have reacted to these pressures, often with concern. However, the issue is not if District neighborhoods will change, but how growth and change will occur and what strategies are in place to guide it in a way that is feasible for developers and desirable for neighborhoods.

## CAPTURING OPPORTUNITIES

The positive effects of regional and city-wide growth include a growing and diversified employment base, economic development and increased tax revenues to fund public services. The negative impacts include increased traffic and associated declines in air quality, unequal access to jobs and opportunities, and increasing housing costs. Creating appropriate designs for TOD means neighborhoods can capitalize on the positive opportunities and mitigate negative impacts.

Existing Metro infrastructure, including bus routes and subway stops, presents a great opportunity for neighborhoods to capture the positive aspects of regional growth while mitigating negative impacts. The opportunities are many:

- Land is available for development without displacement or neighborhood disturbance. The District has over 2,000 acres of vacant or abandoned land within a 10-minute walk of high quality bus or rail service. WMATA controls over 1.7 million square feet of developable land.
- The region's roadways are filling up. Legendary traffic congestion in the suburbs is making District neighborhoods with high quality transit service more appealing for employers and new residents;
- Transit ridership is increasing. WMATA has reported a region-wide increase of over 100,000 daily trips since 1998;

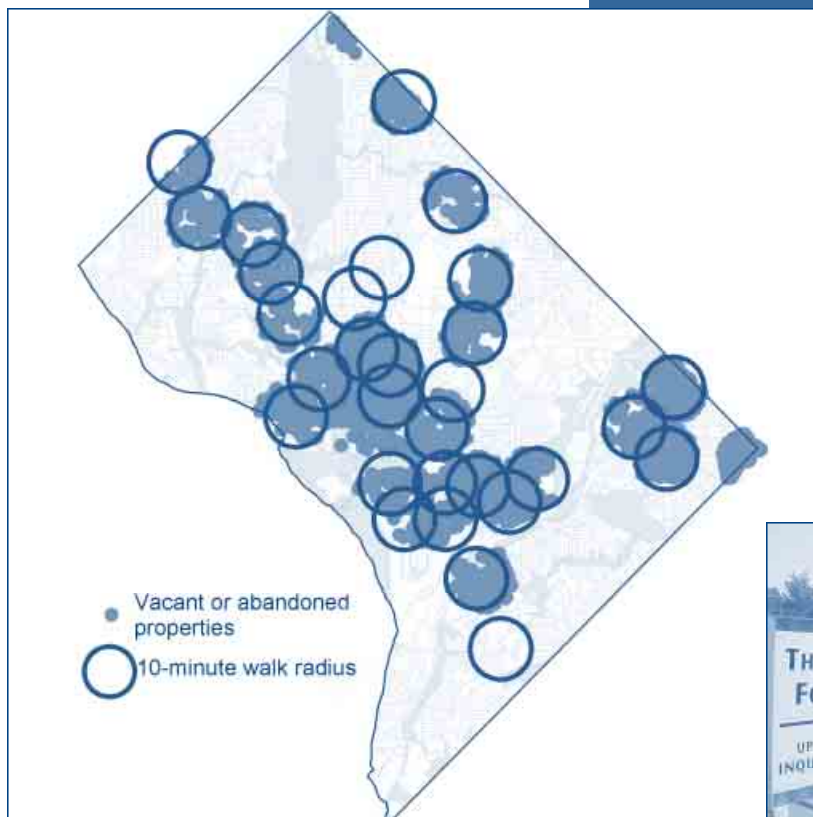
- Air quality concerns are more acute. The region risks losing substantial federal funding for transportation infrastructure if air quality standards are not met. Better utilization and promotion of transit is essential.
- Neighborhoods want solutions to traffic congestion, housing and economic development. Over a third of neighborhood clusters identified traffic, affordable housing, and/or economic development as priority issues in their Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAPs).

### DEVELOPER'S ADVICE FOR TOD

At the June 2002 workshop, ULI: The Urban Land Institute – a national development trade and research organization - shared with participants draft recommendations from a ULI study group convened to identify guiding principles for implementing TOD from the private sector perspective. These recommendations included:

1. Identify a Vision
2. Create Partnerships
3. Use Innovative Tools
4. Creatively Address Parking
5. Create hubs of mobility
6. Think 360 degrees
7. Transit area must work for pedestrians
8. Be Realistic about Retail
9. Think of the corridor and not just the station
10. Make Buses a Better Idea
11. Every Price Point Likes to Live Around Transit (diversity)
12. Development Around Transit Responds to a Changing and Growing Market
13. Factor Economic Feasibility into Planning
14. Invest for the Future
15. Commuting, Work and Corporate Culture is Changing

ULI's report on TOD Principles will be available in October 2002 and can be obtained through the web at <http://www.uli.org>



Vacant land around metro stations provides an immediate opportunity to redefine and recreate our neighborhood centers.

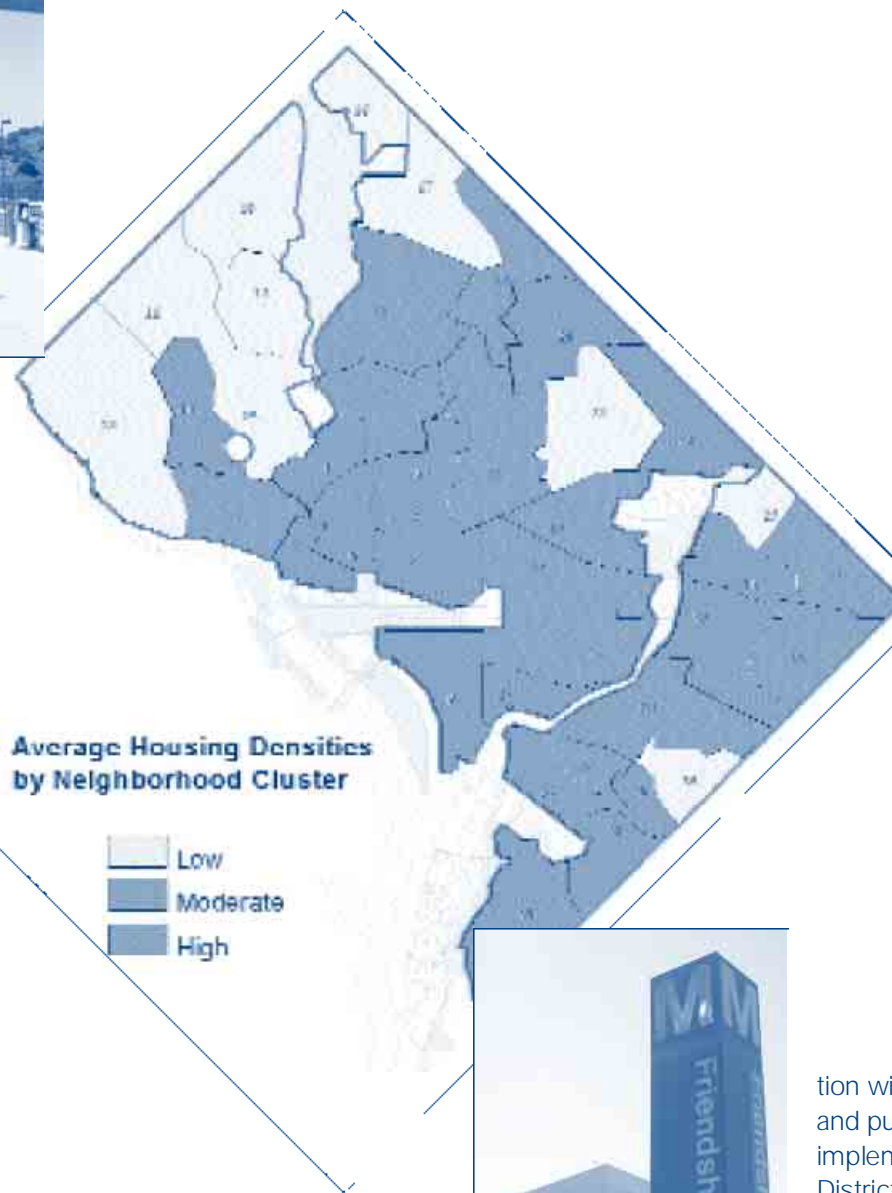




## TAILORING PRINCIPLES FOR DISTRICT NEIGHBORHOODS

The TOD principles presented in this guidebook are typical for many cities and communities trying to plan for development that maximizes the use of transit. However, the District is unique in a number of ways: it is a wholly urban jurisdiction with well established neighborhoods; the transit system has been in place for over a generation; and there are limited opportunities for planning and redevelopment for whole new neighborhoods around transit areas as exist in the suburbs. Each neighborhood has its own unique strengths and challenges. What might be appropriate in Foggy Bottom may not be feasible or desirable in Deanwood. A transit-corridor may have consistently higher densities all along its length but not penetrate very deeply into the neighborhood; whereas a transit-area may be concentrated around a single node.

Therefore, these Principles are general guidelines that should be adopted and modified as appropriate to respond to unique neighborhood conditions. Generally speaking, however, is that areas around high-quality transit service are characterized by a relatively higher level activity of a greater variety than areas farther removed and less convenient to transit and the neighborhood center.



Washington neighborhoods vary in their land uses, densities, and development potential. Transit-oriented neighborhood centers should provide increased activity relative to the character of the surrounding neighborhood.



## G NEIGHBORHOOD

are quite different from current land uses, densities, and market conditions. These areas are extremely attractive to many other neighborhoods and may not attract any development at all. The District's neighborhoods are characterized predominantly by single family homes and rowhouses; others are a mix of traditional rowhouses and smaller apartment buildings; while others still are dominated by larger apartment buildings. These land uses define the identity of the neighborhood and its residents.

TOD design principles must take into account the unique characteristics of each neighborhood while providing opportunities for growth and strengthening the existing neighborhood. Continued citizen education, understanding and participation will help developers, investors, and public officials to appropriately implement TOD for each unique District neighborhood.